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Assistant SecNav visits NAVAIR T&E laboratory

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The U.S. Navy's Assistant Secretary for Research, Development and Acquisition, John J. Young, visited the E-2 Systems Test and Evaluation Laboratory at Patuxent River Naval Air Station in mid-October.

Rear Adm. David J. Venlet, Program Executive Officer for Tactical Aircraft Programs, hosted Young in the Rear Adm. William A. Moffett building before a tour of the laboratory with NAVAIR's Neal Rothback, Network Centric Warfare Integrated Product Team co-lead. NAVAIR leadership briefed Young on the success of many programs supporting the Navy's Open Architecture initiative.

The laboratory's operations managers, Larry Forte and Larry Talley, answered many of Young's questions, and showed him the tangible successes of those programs currently implemented, as well as some in the testing phase. Among the systems Young observed was the Group II Mission Computer Replacement Processor, which replaces the now obsolete L-304 computer, with a modern tactical computer, saving weight and increasing computational power. He saw the upgraded Hawkeye 2000 mission computer, which incorporates a commercial off-the-shelf Pentium single-board computer and Linux operating system. This upgrade provides more computer-processing throughput and allows the E-2C to provide greater battlespace management to the carrier strike group and joint and coalition force commanders.

Diana Wathen, E-2 Single Integrated Air Picture team lead, demonstrated the program's on-going work toward a Single Integrated Air Picture. This includes an evaluation recently conducted by the team of a joint system product build. Young asked the team its opinion on the product, compared to the Tactical Component Network. Chris Sullivan explained the extent of a limited evaluation the team performed of the network and the differences between the two approaches.

Young also asked about challenges facing the E-2 program, with regards to software integration. Pat Kohli, NCW Open Architecture Lead, demonstrated how the E-2/C-2 program office (PMA-231) is continuously evaluating and implementing software modernization to facilitate transition of the existing E-2 operational flight program to an environment using commercially available systems.

Venlet said, "The Naval Aviation Enterprise has embraced open architecture as a fundamental building block of weapon system development from its very inception. Our government/industry teams continue to leverage these open system strategies and

concepts in achieving reduction in overall development cycle times and delivering increased system capabilities to the Fleet faster and cheaper. The advantages of integrating open architecture designs and contracting strategies are measurable and pronounced as is substantiated by our E-2D Advanced Hawkeye and P-8 Multi-Mission Aircraft development programs. The key to continued success will be maintaining the close partnership with industry experts, as we provide the right capabilities, at the right time and right cost to the joint warfighter."

The E-2 Hawkeye team has been representing and directly supporting Venlet's executive office - the aviation domain lead for open architecture initiatives - since June 2004, because of its role as a battle management command and control platform and a central network communications node in aviation. E-2 Program Manager Capt. Randy Mahr said, "Today's evolving E-2 open architecture model paves the way for a more mature system to be used by the E-2D prior to it taking its place in the fleet."

"Open architecture is a business strategy aimed at utilizing and integrating commercial systems, processes and standards, in order to provide improved capabilities to the warfighter more quickly, at lower cost and with greater interoperability than if they were developed and fielded through the standard acquisition process," said Rothback.

"This success is part of our team's contribution to the Navy-wide goal of delivering the right force, with the right readiness, and at the right cost," said Venlet. "You'll see much more of this as the Naval Aviation Enterprise continues to streamline development and procurement of the systems we send forward to our fleet aviators."

The Naval Aviation Enterprise is a partnership among Naval leadership to optimize processes that maintain current readiness, while investing in future readiness.

The enterprise concept focuses Naval aviation on the single fleet-driven metric of producing aircraft ready for tasking at reduced cost.